

Midyear cuts coming for Montgomery

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Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett will submit a plethora of midyear cuts in coming weeks to fill a growing gap in the county's budget.

Leggett says the lack of an ambulance fee and an expected surge in state spending requirements will force officials to identify reductions beyond those he already proposed for public safety departments.

"People aren't wanting to bite the bullet and deal with realities," he said. "There is nothing out there that will change the situation from what we see today."

County Council members have said they would like to wait for new income tax projections before identifying any further cuts this fiscal year.

"We only have 7 1/2 months to address a full-year problem," Leggett said. "The longer we defer action, the more difficult it will be to realize these savings. Inaction will require only larger reductions in services in FY12."

In late September, executive officials estimated a \$145 million budget gap for fiscal 2012. Now, Leggett says the shortfall is closer to \$200 million.

He referenced an expected \$13.5 million increase in state-mandated spending for schools and an anticipated loss of federal grant money tied to the wave of Republicans elected to Congress in the midterm election.

County residents voted to kill the suburb's ambulance fee, creating a \$12.5 million gap in this fiscal year's budget.

Leggett warned that such an outcome would lead to massive public safety cuts, such as pink slips for 87 firefighters and the elimination of all school resource officers.

Services for seniors, the homeless and at-risk teenagers also would be reduced under Leggett's proposal. However, most council members say they never would implement such a drastic plan.

Leggett didn't specify the new cuts, but vowed, "I'm not increasing taxes. That's off the table."

The county closed a \$1 billion budget shortfall earlier this year.